

Chapter 7

Workaholism and work engagement: Differences and mutual relationships*

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Introduction

Although workaholism and work engagement have been the subject of interest of work and organization psychologists and management theorists for more than half a century, the nature of these phenomena, especially work addiction, is still under debate. The biggest point of contention is the treatment of workaholism as a positive phenomenon, which according to some researchers is an unnecessary confusion of concepts (e.g. Schaufeli, Shimazu, & Taris, 2009). However, one may wonder whether the lack of consensus on the nature of work addiction does reflect the facts and whether workaholism contains some positive elements, which are in line with the phenomenon of work engagement. This chapter will, among others, attempt to answer this question.

In Poland, research on workaholism and work engagement as separate constructs has been conducted for more or less a decade (e.g. Wojdyło, 2004, 2005, 2006; Golińska, 2005, 2006, 2008; Hornowska & Paluchowski, 2007; Szabowska-Walaszczyk, Zawadzka, & Wojtaś, 2011, Derbis & Baka, 2011). However, compared with global achievements, the number of studies on this subject is still small, and it seems that more such studies are very necessary (see Dudek, 2008). Therefore, this study is also supposed to enrich the knowledge on workaholism and work commitment with research conducted among Polish workers, with particular emphasis on the differences between men and women, different age groups and people working in managerial and non-managerial positions.

With regards to the main purpose of this study – the analysis of the relationship of workaholism with work engagement, based on the assumptions and the results of other studies (Schaufeli et al. 2009; Burke & Fiskensbaum 2009; Gorgievski, Bakker,

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& Schaufeli, 2010), the authors formed a hypothesis that as phenomena with different consequences for the individual (negative vs. positive) they constitute two separate constructs which are also different in structure.

The differences in the level of work engagement and workaholism in terms of demographic factors have not been deeply analysed so far, even though they seem to be partly justified. Regarding workaholism, researchers and practitioners demonstrate its processual character, variety of reasons, or occupational risk, which may be reflected in different levels of dependence on work among men and women, different age classes or types of positions. The extensive research by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) on samples from several countries has shown significant, although not very large, differences relating to gender in the level of absorption, dedication and vigour, as well as in different age groups. Therefore, it is assumed that there are differences in the dimensions of workaholism and work engagement between: men and women, different age groups, and type of position (managerial and non-managerial).

7.1. Workaholism and work engagement – explanation of concepts

Researchers emphasize the complexity of the phenomenon of workaholism, which is reflected in the multiplicity of definitions, typology of workaholics, or the number and type of dimensions that constitute work addiction. Regarding term “workaholism,” most authors cite the thesis by Oates from 1971 in which this concept appeared for the first time, although term “workaholic” had already been used by the researcher as early as in 1968 (Oates, 1968, 1971). Since that time slowly but steadily the interest in this phenomenon has been growing, both among practitioners (i.e. psychotherapists) and theorists – especially work and organization psychologists. Researchers have been trying to determine, among other things, what “workaholism” is and – despite the obvious differences between specific definitions – one can find some similarities in the existing concepts.

Firstly, a person addicted to work devotes much more time to it than their colleagues, usually staying after hours (when others have already left), often taking work home on the weekend or giving up on leisure time during holidays and leave (see Oates, 1968; Machlowitz, 1980; McMillan & O’Driscoll, 2006). The second determinant of workaholism, indicated by most authors, is the difficult-to-control compulsion to work, underlying obsessive-compulsive behaviours (see Oates, 1968; Machlowitz, 1980; Schaufeli et al., 2009). Non-workaholics who work more than the expected norm, do their job either out of necessity (e.g. financial), more or less justified fear of dismissal, need for promotion or as a result of the so-called intrinsic motivation – *I work a lot because I like what I do*. In addition, non-workaholics can separate the professional sphere from the private sphere, not thinking and not talking about work constantly, and they know how to relax during leisure time (if they have no other

problems). Their work does not have negative influence on their immediate family, or the functioning of their family or relationship, which is quite significant also in the case of other addictions. The authors, for the purpose of this study, adopted a definition of workaholism by Schaufeli et al. (2009) which takes into account its above two manifestations, i.e. working after hours and compulsion to work.

The biggest point of contention in the definition of workaholism is a trend to its extreme assessment and treatment of the phenomenon as either only positive or only negative. Some researchers and theorists believe that workaholics experience pleasure, joy and fulfilment while performing their duties (e.g. Machlowitz, 1980; McMillan & O'Driscoll 2006; Ng, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2007) and, simultaneously, are seen as good and dedicated employees. Others (e.g. Killinger, 2007; Schaufeli et al., 2009; Fassel, 1990) claim that workaholism is a strongly negative phenomenon (and even an addiction which should be treated) and is mainly related to undesirable indicators of mental well-being. Unfortunately, previous research results due to the lack of consensus and explicitness do not resolve this issue. Some of them confirm the relationship of workaholism with reduced feeling of happiness and satisfaction with life or negative perception of one's health (del Líbano, Lorens, Salanova, & Schaufeli, 2010; Burke, 1999; Shimazu, Schaufeli, & Taris, 2010). Different conclusions were formulated by Golińska (2008) who demonstrated that workaholics are more satisfied with their lives, experience fewer somatic complaints and had been in a better mood than non-workaholics in the last week before the survey. The authors of this study lean towards the thesis that both groups of researchers may be right. Each object of addiction is a source of positive reinforcement (otherwise it would not have such a strong causative power), and when an individual is under the influence of (drug, gambling, sex, food, Internet, etc.) he or she feels pleasure. Problems arise when the object of addiction "disappears" – an individual then experiences negative emotions, in the case of workaholism, such as, anxiety, irritability, guilt because of professional inactivity etc. (see Ng et al., 2007). What is also important is the dynamics of the phenomenon itself – workaholism in the initial phase¹ may look different than in subsequent periods when there are also family and health problems which also impact the well-being of an addict. Unfortunately, according to the Authors, so far no longitudinal studies confirming the phasic nature of workaholism have been carried out, although in this case you can refer to other and better-studied addictions or descriptions by therapists involved in the treatment of workaholics (e.g. Killinger, 2007). The researchers of this phenomenon also indicate the types of workaholics who are differentiated by the level of job satisfaction (see Spence & Robbins, 1992), or the type of the con-

¹ Beginner workaholics may be happy and satisfied with work which can translate into efficiency, which also meets with general approval both at work and through promotions and higher salary – in the family and among friends. All these positive stimuli motivate the person to work harder and, with the occurrence of additional, favourable factors and circumstances (personality traits, educational environment, a specific situation), intrinsic positive motivation to work slowly turns into a compulsion that is far from being a positive phenomenon.

sequences connected with addiction to work – positive vs. negative ones (e.g. Scott, Moore, & Miceli, 1997).

Additionally, what undoubtedly makes it difficult to classify workaholism as either a positive or negative phenomenon is the fact that among all the addictions it meets with the greatest understanding and social acceptance. In some circles “to be addicted to work” is actually a positive connotation, so one can also encounter words “positive workaholism.” Schaufeli et al. (2009) in order to avoid unnecessary confusion of concepts (see typology by Scott et al., 1997 or Spence & Robbins, 1992) propose the introduction of separate term “work engagement” which refers to employees working above the norm, but drawing satisfaction, strength and joy from work and experiencing a kind of *flow* defined by Csikszentmihalyi (2005). They define work commitment as a positive state of mind associated with work. It is characterized by vigour, absorption and dedication. Vigour means a high level of energy, effort and willingness to take effort and continuation of work despite the mounting obstacles and problems. Absorption refers to the state of full concentration on the task being performed, “losing oneself in” its implementation. However, dedication is characterized by “getting involved in work and experiencing a sense of purpose, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge” (Schaufeli et al., 2009, p. 324). This way of understanding work engagement was adopted in this study.

Both workaholics and those engaged in their jobs work equally hard. However, the latter are motivated by the so-called intrinsic motivation and those addicted to work by compulsion which is out of their control. In their research Schaufeli et al. (2009) showed that workaholism is a separate construct in relation to work engagement, which will be the subject of analysis of this study. It should be noted that studies on this construct are increasingly becoming part of the developing trend of positive psychology, as a counterweight to the research on pathology, dysfunction, mental illness and behavioural disorders.

7.2. Research methodology

Sample description

The study conducted in 2013–2014 involved by 967 respondents, 31% of men and 67% of women (2% did not indicate their gender) working in different occupations and at different positions in Polish organizations. The largest group were teachers (27.4%), followed by office workers – secretaries, HR workers, clerks, specialists, accountants (13.9%), medical representatives (7.1%) and managers of HR and sales departments, directors and CEOs (9.3%). Most respondents were from 31 to 40 years of age (32.7%), followed by 21–30 years (25.4%) and 41–50 (23.2%). The smallest group were people from 51 to 60 years of age (14.9%) and over 60 (3.3%). Managerial positions were occupied by 19.4% of the sample.

Research methods

The study used two questionnaires in the shortened version, each by Schaufeli and the team – to study workaholism (DUWAS – Dutch Work Addiction Scale) and work engagement (UEWS – Utrecht Work Engagement Scale). The first of them was subjected to adaptation by Kożusznik, Dyląg, and Jaworek (2014). It consists of two subscales: WE (working excessively) and WC (working compulsively). Each of them is part of another questionnaire: EC – WorkBAT by Spence and Robbins (1992), and WC – WART by Robinson (1999).² However, UWES in the Polish version is on the website of the author and in such a form, after prior comparison with the English version, was used in the research.³ The shortened version of the workaholism scale consists of 10 statements, five for each dimension to which the person tested has to refer to one of four ways: 1 – *(almost) never*, 4 – *(almost) always*. The shortened version of the work engagement survey includes 9 statements, three for each dimension, which the respondent is asked to answer in the seven-point scale from 0 – *never*, to 7 – *always/every day*. The questionnaire also included the section with personal details containing questions about gender, age, work experience, occupation and position (managerial – non-managerial). Psychometric properties of individual questionnaires are in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1 *Psychometric properties of questionnaires: DUWAS and UWES*

Questionnaire	Subscale	α Cronbach	M	SD	Number of statements
DUWAS	Working excessively	.74	2.51	.65	5
	Working compulsively	.77	2.02	.65	5
UWES	Vigour	.80	3.92	1.18	3
	Dedication	.78	4.30	1.20	3
	Absorption	.72	3.85	1.21	3

² The following questionnaires to study workaholism are used in Poland: in the adaptation by Wojdyło (2005) – WART, constructed by Golińska (2005) – SZAP (Skala do Badania Zaabsorbowania Pracą/Scale of Commitment to Work), and KOP (Kwestionariusz Obciążenia Pracą/Work Load Questionnaire) by Hornowska and Paluchowski (2007).

³ Full, 17-statement, Polish version of scale UWES has been adapted by Szabowska-Walaszczyk et al. (2011).

7.3. Results

Relationship of workaholism with work engagement

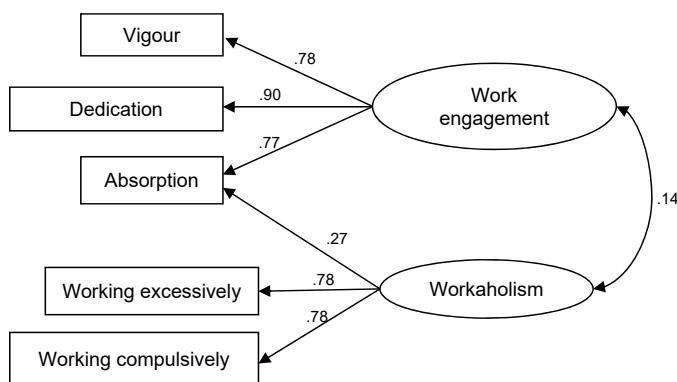
The correlation analysis showed quite a clear relationship between the dimensions of the tested constructs, separately: workaholism and work engagement ($r = .61-.74$). In addition, there was a moderate level of correlation between absorption, excessive work and compulsive work, weak between dedication and the two dimensions of workaholism, and very weak between vigour and compulsive work (see Table 7.2).

Table 7.2 *Correlations between specific subscales*

	1	2	3	4
Vigour	–			
Dedication	.713**	–		
Absorption	.633**	.738**	–	
Working excessively	.039	.105**	.286**	–
Working compulsively	.066*	.118**	.298**	.609**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

In order to verify the hypothesis about the distinct nature of the constructs studied – workaholism and work engagement – structural equation modelling (SEM) using module AMOS 6.0 of statistical package SPSS 14 was conducted.



Affinity values: CMIN/df = 1.87, $p = .132$; GFI = .998, AGFI = .998, RMSEA = .030, NFI = .997, CFI = .999.

Figure 7.1. *The relationship between workaholism and work engagement – structural equation modelling (SEM).*

The analysis confirmed the hypothesis about the distinct nature of phenomena, such as workaholism and work engagement, though there is a weak relationship between them ($r = .14$). It should be emphasized that the above model (Figure 7.1) achieved perfect affinity values (Arbuckle, 2006). The figure description contains more detail.

Workaholism and work engagement vs. demographic factors

In order to verify the differences in the various dimensions of workaholism and work engagement regarding gender, *t*-Student tests were conducted for independent samples. The analyses showed that women compared to men are more preoccupied with their work [$t(942) = -4.97$; $p < .001$], are devoted to a larger extent [$t(946) = -3.44$; $p = .001$] and manifest higher energy levels [$t(945) = 3.11$; $p = .002$], while demonstrating a higher level both in excessive work [$t(941) = -2.94$; $p = .003$] and compulsive work [$t(944) = -2.18$; $p = .029$].

If one analyses the discrepancies between managerial and non-managerial positions, the only difference observed is the dimension of “excessive work” – people working in managerial positions are more likely to work above the norm than non-managers [$t(945) = 4.0$; $p < .001$].

No statistically significant differences between different age groups in terms of vigour and absorption were noted. In the case of dedication, the lowest level was declared by workers between 21 and 30 years of age, and the highest – over 60 years of age. Similar results were obtained in the case of compulsive work. Regarding the dimension of excessive work, the lowest results were again obtained by the youngest people, and the highest – within the range of 31–40 years of age. For details, see Table 7.3.

Table 7.3 *Significance of workaholism and work engagement in different age groups (ANOVA)*

	21–30 (<i>n</i> = 246)	31–40 (<i>n</i> = 316)	41–50 (<i>n</i> = 224)	51–60 (<i>n</i> = 144)	Over 60 (<i>n</i> = 32)	F	<i>p</i>
Vigour	3.85	3.93	3.97	3.89	4.05	.432	ns
Dedication	4.11	4.32	4.43	4.32	4.5	2.440	.045
Absorption	3.73	3.92	3.91	3.79	3.87	1.061	ns
Working excessively	2.41	2.54	2.61	2.48	2.43	3.075	.016
Working compulsively	1.83	2.00	2.15	2.12	2.17	9.534	< .001

Conclusions

The hypothesis about the distinct nature of workaholism and work engagement as two different constructs was confirmed, although one of the dimensions – absorption, ascribed to work engagement, is also associated with workaholism. The results obtained are very similar to the results of research by Schaufeli, Taris, and Rhenen (2008), which also reported the relationship of absorption with addiction to work but, in contrast to this study, the opposite, although weak, correlation of workaholism with work engagement was observed. Schaufeli et al. (2008) suggest that the tested constructs may overlap in terms of preoccupation with work, while stressing the diversity of motives underlying (see: Introduction, p. 91). Perhaps absorption to some extent influences the attractiveness of work addiction. Full concentration on the task and being “here and now” makes a person not think at the moment about their problems and issues that are uncomfortable and cause psychological discomfort. At the same time, complete focus on the task has a positive effect on its implementation, thereby providing additional reinforcement. The relationship between absorption with harmonious and obsessive passion, terms conceptually similar to engagement and workaholism, was also achieved in research by Ho, Wong, and Lee (2011) and Stoeber, Childs, Hayward, and Feast (2011).

As for the overall relationship of the surveyed constructs, Burke and Fiskensbaum (2009) also observed a weak relationship of “work with passion,” equivalent to work commitment, work addition, or workaholism, in all three tested samples: managers from Canada, psychologists from Australia, and journalists from Norway. The complexity of the relationship of the constructs analysed is showed by the research by Gorgievski et al. (2010), which noted, among others, a weak relationship of one of the dimensions of workaholism – excessive work with work engagement, and a stronger relationship of excessive work than work engagement with the declared innovation in both full-time workers and the self-employed; at the same time excessive work was strongly associated with compulsive work.

As for the demographic differences with respect to the tested constructs, in all of the cases where they were present they were not large and did not exceed one standard deviation. In this study, women received slightly higher scores in all dimensions of work engagement and workaholism. In studies by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) on the validation of the UWES questionnaire, men showed higher levels of absorption, dedication and vigour. Perhaps the explanation for this difference lies in the adverse social-economic factors in Poland – still high unemployment (and higher among women) and greater pressure (insufficiently high salary of a spouse/partner) for a woman to take paid work and, at the same time, more difficult access to work at higher and more respected social positions (see Jaworek & Dyląg, 2015). Thus, women who have a job value it more and to a greater extent devote to it, which increases the likelihood of workaholism. It should be stressed that there are few studies that put a special emphasis on gender differences in relation to workaholism.

holism, and it seems that work addiction may take a different form in women and men, as well as have a different source.⁴

As for the discrepancy in the level of constructs examined in terms of their position, it is only in the case of excessive work that one can observe a statistically significant difference – managers work more and are more often in a hurry than non-managers. Taking into account the characteristics of working at a managerial position, this result is hardly surprising. What is somewhat surprising is the lack of differences in the level of compulsive work, as workaholism seems to be more closely associated with managers than regular employees.

In the case age differences, one can notice some relationships. The lowest level of dedication and the two dimensions of workaholism of all ages are characteristic of the youngest workers, and the highest level of dedication and compulsive work is manifested by those at the oldest age. There might have been some selection in this case. The closer to the retirement age, the more people, if only they have such an opportunity, make use of benefits or early retirement. Thus, among workers over 60 years of age there are more people who cannot imagine life without work (working compulsively), and those for whom it is of great importance and are willing to devote a lot to it. The youngest workers, however, are at the stage of induction to work and getting familiar with it. In this group neither compulsion nor attachment to the place of work had a chance to develop. It seems that workaholism, like any addiction, takes time to develop (see Killinger, 2007) and perhaps this also applies to work engagement. Of course, there may be many different reasons for this. Therefore, further research in this direction is recommended.

In conclusion, this study showed the distinct nature of the constructs examined, i.e. workaholism and work engagement. However, there appeared a relationship between them, which, according to the authors, should be further explored in order to better understand these phenomena. The results also showed some differences in the level of demographic dimensions of the studied constructs. The data obtained should be verified and explained in the context of other variables (e.g. cultural specificity). The results, due to the cross-sectional nature of the research and the resulting limitations, should be treated more as a starting point for further research, particularly longitudinal research, as it seems that only thanks to this kind of research one will be able to know the exact nature of workaholism, its sources, causes, the dynamics of development, typology etc.

⁴ The research by Golińska (2008) found a slightly different impact of personality variables in explaining workaholism among men and women.

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